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AUTHOR Hess, Harrie F.
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ABSTRACT

Height is one important variable among many in the elicitation of the submissive response. In addition to overt behavioral components, the submissive response involves a cognitive component, in which oneself is perceived as smaller and weaker, and an affective component, consisting of a feeling of intimidation by the other. Submission is a species-specific response pattern, basically unlearned but affected by experience. While the dyadic relationship is usually the basis of the height-submission relationship, height differentials are hypothesized to exert predictably similar consequences in group situations, where the submission to height by many individuals leads to the assignment of leadership and responsibility. This behavior pattern constitutes a relatively stable trans-situational personality characteristically typifying the behaviors of dominant or submissive individuals. Height, through the mediation of the submission variable, is seen as a determinant of the outcome of certain significant social interactions, such as the assignment of pay and status. Since height differential acts as a sign-stimulus both within and across sexes, females, only 25 percent of whom are taller than the average male, tend more than males to assume submissive roles, and to be less frequently assigned positions of dominance, authority, and high pay. Understanding the importance of height may have significance in reaching a better understanding of the phenomena attributed to sexism and of social processes in general. (JAC)

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HEIGHT AS A DETERMINANT OF SUBMISSION AND THE ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Harrie F. Hess
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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Harrie F. Hess
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purpose of this paper is to outline a theoretical position concerning the variable of height as it relates to certain human interactions and to the socially significant consequences of those interactions. The interactions which are our focus are many which transpire in the dyadic relationship between persons in close physical proximity, and in small groups under the same conditions. The socially significant consequences of such interactions are comprised of patterns of behavior which lead to role-assignments and role-assumptions which in turn determine assignment of authority, status, and eventually, in modern culture, the allocation of rewards in the form of power and pay.

Much of what will be said must be regarded as theoretical or even speculative, although every effort has been made to anchor the theoretical constructs in empirical research. As in most areas of psychology, the empirical results in this area are subject to different interpretations and are capable of plausible subsumption within alternate networks of theoretical statements. The present author cannot claim priority in hypothesizing the relationships between the variables to be considered, for these formulations have roots in the work of many authors whose disciplines include biology, ethology, sociology, anthropology, political science, comparative and experimental psychology, and history, among others.

Height: one variable among many determining submission and its consequences. Evidence will be presented that height is related to significant outcomes of human interaction such as power and pay. In our thinking, an important mediating variable between height and its correlates is the variable of dominance/submission, which is seen as a function of the differential height of persons in interaction, and as a precursor of certain predictable consequences, including power and pay. Perhaps it is important to state here at the outset we are not saying that the important mediating variable of dominance/submission is solely determined by differences in height. We shall assert only that height is one variable among many comprising a complex stimulus configuration which elicits the response pattern which we call submission. Research and anecdotal evidence suggests that, in addition to height, each of the following are physical or behavioral variables related to the elicitation of the submissive response: body mass, weight, vigor, intelligence, age (and its related characteristics such as hair distribution, hair color, and skin texture) and voice characteristics. In addition to these variables there are certain other culturally-dictated cues such as body adornment reflecting class or status differences, behavioral affectations associated with class or status, occupation, wealth, and leadership status ascribed by authority. Such culturally-derived variables may act in concert with natural physical and behavioral cues such as height and vigor, and together determine the structure of dominance/submission relationships in any specific social interaction.

The theoretical view being presented here, then, is that height is one important variable among many related to the elicitation of the submissive response.

In denying at the outset the intention of proposing that height is the solitary or even major variable determining submission and its consequences, we have had to skip lightly over some basic considerations, such as the nature of submission itself, to which we now return.

Submission: a species-specific response to a definable stimulus configuration. In the theoretical view presented here, submission is seen as a response pattern evoked by a configuration of stimuli of which height is an important component, and which comprises a sign-stimulus or "releaser" for the submissive behavior. Submission in chance, passing dyadic encounters among strangers is expressed in space-avoidance, gaze aversion, and smiling. In addition to these overt behavioral components, the submissive response, if fully elicited, involves a cognitive component in which oneself is perceived as smaller and weaker, and an affective component, consisting of a feeling of intimidation by the other. Should dominant (and probably taller) individuals boldly confront submissive (and probably smaller) individuals by invading their personal space or otherwise threatening them, further and more extreme submissive behaviors may be displayed in a somewhat predictable hierarchy, ranging from coyness to physical prostration.

Our reference to sign-stimuli reveals that submission is considered a species-specific response pattern to a given stimulus configuration.

(It is granted that submission as a general category of response is not limited to homo sapiens, but is found in many social species, including dogs and other anthropoids, to mention a few.) The basic pattern of submissive behavior is seen as unlearned, although, as is the case with many inherent response tendencies, it is subject to accentuation, diminution, and elaboration through experience. The submissive response in homo sapiens thus parallels a number of other known inherent response patterns which have been documented through research with humans and other anthropoids. Among such patterns are visual cliff avoidance (Gibson & Walk, 1960), snake avoidance and mutiliated-body avoidance (Hebb, 1972) and visual exploration of the human face by human infants (Fantz, 1963).

If we can for a moment speculate upon some hypothetical circumstance in which the submissive response pattern might be studied in its pristine state, we would expect that the pattern and some of its cognitive and affective concomitants would be elicited immediately upon perception of the appropriate stimulus configuration. The response would not be, and is not, we contend, dependent upon elaborate cognitive appraisal of the situation. In fact, its overt expression in motor behavior may be stifled by cognitive activity related to learned compensatory skills, cultural patterns, or sense of security deduced from other aspects of the stimulus situation, such as nearby protective authority.

Submission has been stressed in this discussion, rather than dominance or the dominance/submission dimension, because it is seen as a more basic pattern of response in structuring social relationships,

and it is seen as preceding and determining subsequent behavior in social situations. In dyadic relationships, dominance, the pattern complementary to submission, will be expressed in one party when the other defers. (You may recall, for example, an old comic situation in which two characters, Alphonse and Gaston, each repeatedly deferred to the other, with the result that neither could proceed through the door at which they had met.) If neither party defers, on the other hand, the stage is set for physical combat.

While the dyadic relationship may be the prototypical one within which the height-submission relationship is most easily construed, height differentials are hypothesized to exert predictably similar consequences in group situations, where multiple deference to the person or persons of greatest height leads to the assignment of leadership and responsibility and to the emergence of a dominance hierarchy, which results in certain necessary and beneficial consequences such as the limitation of intra-specific aggressions. A person relegated to a dominant position by the culmination of submission responses may take on charismatic status, and almost certainly will have greater access to rewards which the group can provide, e.g. sexual partners, food, labor of others, and money. More than incidentally, the dominant and probably taller, individual may literally be "elevated" to an even higher position on a rostrum, litter, pedestal, or throne.

Other conceptions of dominance and submission. It is acknowledged, even emphasized, that our use of the terms dominance and submission differs from familiar usage of the same terms. In common usages dominance

is seen as a behavior pattern in which one engages in purposeful assertion over another for gains to be desired from such behavior, such as exploitation, power, and access to resources. In this sense, the dominant pattern is instrumental behavior, usually understood as having been acquired via instrumental learning or modeling. Submission is often construed in the same manner, instrumental in achieving personal goals through complementarity to the dominant pattern. From the present point of view, the phenomena of instrumental dominant and submissive behavior are recognized as real and valid. Such recognition, however, does not refute the usefulness of the submission construct as elaborated above, that is, submission as a spontaneous species-specific response pattern involving motor, affective, and cognitive components and elicited by a stimulus configuration of which a usual component is a taller stimulus person. Submission, thus defined, is a precursor of dominance and submission responses of the instrumental kind.

Another conception of dominance-submission, the trait conception, is that these behavior patterns constitute relatively stable trans-situational personality characteristics typifying the behaviors of dominant or submissive individuals. Such a view is consistent with our own insofar as such characteristic response patterns are understood to be the end-products of repeated assignments, partially on the basis of height differences, to the dominant or submissive role.

Height and Sex. It has been stated that height, through the mediation of the submission variable, is seen as a determinant of the outcome of certain significant social interactions, leading to the assignment of authority, status, and pay. Should this be true, then

females, who are on the average about three and one-half inches shorter than males, would be assigned authority, etc., to a lesser degree than males and would be expected to receive lower pay. That these outcomes do in fact prevail is usually attributed to sex discrimination, when, actually, if our theorizing has merit, the outcomes may be attributable, to some degree, to differences in height between the sexes. Perhaps we should be as concerned about "heightism" or "sizism" as we are about sexism.

Sexism or Sizism? Throughout modern history, and perhaps especially in the past few decades, attention has been focused through women's movements on the disadvantaged status of women vis-a-vis men. That disadvantaged status has been attributed to numerous factors, such as women's biological roles of bearing, feeding, and rearing children, and to their lesser physical strength, but especially to cultural factors initiated long ago and perpetuated by societal inertia and fueled by male power, arrogance, chauvinism, and, sometimes, it is asserted, just plain malevolence toward females. The female disadvantage is often summarily referred to as a product of Sexism, as though by so labelling its source we better understand the phenomenon. Actually what is required for better understandings is recognition that the Sexism rubric probably subsumes and obscures a number of variables begging for analysis and clarification. The position offered in this paper asserts that among the important variables leading to the social phenomenon called Sexism are certain species-specific response tendencies elicited by stimulus characteristics which on the average differentiate the sexes. We also assert that height (and its correlative, body size) is one such important variable, and that through learning

its significance in human interactions we shall better understand the phenomena subsumed and obscured by the Sexism label. Through appropriate research it shall be possible to investigate the sources of variance in the phenomenon we call Sexism. The present paper, in fact, summarizes the thinking which has led to a few such projects. Much of the previous research upon which our formulations are based will be summarized by the other participants in this symposium; a few illustrative studies are cited here to demonstrate that to some degree our formulations have an empirical base.

In his book The Height of Your Life, Keyes (1980) cites many examples of the influence of differential height upon social interaction. Some are merely amusing, like Sophia Loren's having to walk in a trench beside the shorter Alan Ladd to preserve the appropriate male/female height relationship and accentuate the power and masculinity of the male protagonis (Stone, 1979), and Greta Garbo's insistence on being photographed on a pedestal. Others are somewhat sobering, such as the elaborate efforts to fool the voting public by depicting presidential candidates as taller than they are in real life; and some cause downright consternation as we learn, for example, that men's salaries, as estimated from the face value of their life insurance, increase as a direct function of the men's height (Keyes, 1980). This evidence for height as a correlate and possible determinant of salary gives rise to one of the papers in this symposium, in which the height-salary relationship is re-addressed in samples consisting of both males andfemales.

One of the major concerns of the women's movements is the pay differential between men and women, and a major objective, which appears to have been largely frustrated to this point, is to reduce or eliminate pay differentials, which seem to persistently reappear like repressed manifestations of an underlying neurosis. If height is indeed relative to salary both within each sex and across sexes, then a new understanding of these problems of pay differentials may be within our reach, and new solutions may be suggested.

Not only does research suggest that taller people get paid more, it also suggests a mechanism by which the height-pay relationship occurs. One study (Prieto, 1975) shows that teachers attribute greater competence to taller students, and another (Ward, 1967) indicates that political leaders tend to be tall. In American Presidential elections, the taller candidate has usually won. These studies, taken together, lead one to believe that taller persons tend to be perceived as more capable, and that they tend to be assigned to positions of authority and leadership.

The human response tendency of submission toward the larger person, already mentioned, appears to constitute the basis for attribution of leadership, dominance, or competence to tall persons. If one avoids taller persons, grants them greater personal space, feels inferior to them and is intimidated by them, is it not likely that in a dyadic relationship one would defer (i.e., assign dominance or leadership) to the larger person?

Research tends to imply the relationships suggested above. Subjects in a study by Caplan & Morton (1961) tended to avoid the personal space

of taller persons to a greater degree than that of shorter persons. Another study shows that among males, shorter S's who do invade the personal space of a larger S report subjective feelings of threat (Bailey, Coffrey, and Hartnett, 1976).

Summary of theoretical position:

The research program of which the papers in this symposium are a part is based upon the empirical findings and theoretical considerations presented above, which we may now summarize: Height is seen as a variable broadly affecting human social interaction. Superior height is seen as a sign-stimulus tending to lead to submissive behaviors in the smaller person in dyadic relationships, and in small persons, in roughly hierarchical order, in small group relationships. Submission is observed in the avoidance of the personal space of larger persons by smaller persons, and in feelings of threat when the personal space of larger persons is invaded. Deference to the larger person is a consequence of a sense of intimidation, with competence, authority and dominance thus ascribed to the larger person. Submission is thus seen as the basic and underlying response tendency in situations eliciting dominance/submission behavior. The assumption of the dominant role by one individual in a dyadic relationship tends to occur initially by default, but over replications becomes elaborated into an instrumental behavior pattern. Since height differential acts as a sign-stimulus both within and across sexes, females, only 25% of whom are taller than the average male, tend more than males to assume submissive roles and to be less frequently assigned to positions of dominance, authority and high pay. These formulations may

have significance in reaching a better understanding of the phenomena attributed to Sexism and of social processes in general.

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